

# Army organizations partner for Hurricane preparedness

By Patti Bielling  
Army North Public Affairs

Members of U.S. Army North say they are impressed with the Army Corps of Engineers and the civil engineering projects they saw in New Orleans during an April visit to the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Outfall Canal.

Members of the command toured the area while in the city for the 2007 National Hurricane Conference, an annual event that gives local, state and federal agencies the opportunity to discuss issues and improve preparedness.

The Corps of Engineers is critical in what they do every day in managing inland waterways and in flood control throughout the United States, said Col. Jeffrey Buchanan, Army North's director of operations.

He said he admired the Soldiers and civilians of the Corps in New Orleans, many of whom are veterans of Hurricane Katrina.

"I am most impressed with their professionalism and dedication to duty," Buchanan said. "They were victims as well as responders – some were not even sure where their families were or if they were safe – but that didn't stop them from doing what they needed to do to help people."

The Interim Gated Closure Structure on the canal is a post-Katrina project that is part of the Corps' plan to upgrade the area's flood and storm protection system, explained Col. Jeff Bedey, commander of the Hurricane Protection Office. The interim structure will provide protection against future storm surges until a permanent structure is built, he said.

"With the structure in place, the city has protection better than ever before," Bedey said. "It includes a series of 11 panel gates that will be open under normal conditions. When a storm surge threatens the safe water level in the canal, the gates will close and a series of pumps will evacuate the water into Lake Pontchartrain."

The federal government has appropriated more than \$5 billion to complete the work of restoring and improving 350 miles of hurricane protection systems from New Orleans to Mississippi. The interim structure on the 17<sup>th</sup> Street Canal is one of more than 100 planned construction projects that include stronger levees, flood walls and interior drainage projects, Bedey said.

Like the Corps of Engineers, Army North plays an important role in disaster preparedness and response, he added.

"Army North exists to protect the American people and our way of life," Buchanan said. "Before a disaster, our Defense Coordinating Officers work daily in each of the 10

Federal Emergency Management Agency regions to plan for disaster response. When we're called out during a disaster, our primary mission is to validate requests for military support and oversee the federal forces responding."

When requested by the state, Army North would come as part of the federal response and bring additional capabilities to save and sustain lives and relieve suffering, he said.

"We may assist with search and rescue, distribute food or supplies, provide clean water, establish safe shelters or restore communication," Buchanan said.

Army North, which traces its lineage to Fifth United States Army, was conceived in 2004 and achieved initial operating capability in October 2005. Following Hurricane Katrina, the fledgling command, as part of Joint Task Force Katrina, was tasked with evacuating the citizens of New Orleans who were stranded after the storm.

Lt. Col. Stan Guthrie was visiting the city for the second time in two years since assisting with the evacuation in the wake of the storm.

"My initial impression was that the city would never be able to be rebuilt," Guthrie said. "Now we're seeing life come back to the city, but it's a long, slow, painful process."

Construction on the New Orleans Area Protection System is scheduled to continue through 2010, Bedey said.